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Western Ky. hog farms challenged

9 state permits in 3 counties contested

By James Bruggers
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The Courier-Journal

A group of about 70 Western Kentucky residents is challenging the environmental permits for nine large hog operations approved for Fulton, Hickman and Carlisle counties.

Each of the farms would have about 5,000 hogs, producing a total of at least 16 million gallons of liquid waste per year that would be spread on fields as fertilizer, according to filings with the administrative appeals office of the Kentucky Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet.

Petitions were signed by 1,000 people opposing the hog farms in Fulton County alone, said Jenny Varden, who owns two farm properties in that county and is among those challenging the permits.

She said state officials in Frankfort did not take their concerns seriously. The residents fear strong odors and water pollution from storm runoff, said attorney Tom FitzGerald, director of

the Kentucky Resources Council, which filed the appeal with Midway attorney Hank Graddy.

"That much waste has to be managed," FitzGerald said, adding that the state's permits for the farms are inadequate.

But one of the farmers, Caleb DeWeese, of Hickman County, said precautions will safeguard the environment and that he was disappointed that the permits

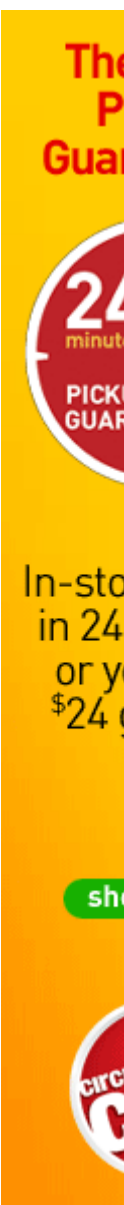


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were challenged.

"I'm not going to tell you they don't stink," he said of modern hog farms. "But it's minimal."

And the 24-year-old, third-generation farmer said the hog farms would benefit the farmers and the community, which relies on agriculture as an economic base.

Chuck Wolfe, spokesman for the state environmental agency, said the cabinet would file a written response with an administrative hearings officer in coming weeks.

The Courier-Journal reported a year ago that the state's hog population was expected to grow by 38 percent over three years, in part because the state has been offering tax breaks.

The nine farms are working with Tosh Farms of Tennessee, which will own the hogs, company president Jimmy Tosh said. He said the legal challenges were anticipated.

Each of the hog barns will collect waste in pits, and then the farmers will apply it as fertilizer at rates that can be taken up by the soil, Tosh said.

But FitzGerald said he believes the state has underestimated the amount of waste that would be produced, and his filings question the calculations for how much can be applied to land without causing pollution during and after rainstorms.

A hearing officer will handle the appeal, and eventually make a recommendation to LaJuana Wilcher, environmental cabinet secretary.

Either side can go to court if they disagree with Wilcher.

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For more environmental news go to James Bruggers' blog, Watchdog Earth at www.courier-journal.com/earthblog

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